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Restore the Internal Security Committees

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The wave of espionage scandals that has swept the Western democracies in recent months is prompting serious efforts to shore up internal security and counter-intelligence operations, which is all to the good.

Those efforts, however, are very much in the nature of cold comfort. The problem has gone on so long, and security attitudes in the West have been so lax, that incalculable damage has almost certainly been done to our defenses. Repairing that damage, and getting minimal safeguards back in place, will be a long-term project.

The Walker case here in the U.S. and disclosure of high-level Communist penetration of the West German government suggest the gravity of the problem. The data that have made their way to Moscow from these two sources alone could severely compromise our naval defenses and the plans of NATO. And these are simply two of the instances that we happen to know about.

That many more such cases are undoubtedly out there waiting for disclosure can be easily deduced from the situation we have permitted to develop. Under the rubric of detente, we have allowed the Soviets and other East-bloc nations to expand their presence on our shores, given them access to reams of information, and routinely demolished existing safeguards against the harm that they can do us.

Over the past decade, the number of Soviet-bloc "diplomatic" personnel in the United States has roughly doubled. There are approximately 4,000 such among us at the moment, at embassies, consulates, and the United Nations. This doesn't count a flood of other East-bloc visitors here on cultural and scientific exchanges, trade delegations, sailors calling at our ports, etc.

How many of these people are engaged in intelligence work is anybody's guess, but official estimates have ranged from one-third to two-thirds of the total. At a minimum, given all these resources and the usual Soviet way of doing business, there are several thousand East-bloc spies in the U.S., plus others engaged in agit-prop, policy subversion, and other elements of Communist Cold Warfare.

While this Communist buildup has been going on, we have been engaged in an internal-security build-down. In response to "civil liberties" agitation in the 1970s, the House and Senate internal security committees that used to keep track of such things have been abolished, both by parliamentary sleight-of-hand. Under similar pressure, police intelligence files have been destroyed, the Subversive Activities Control Board eliminated, and the attorney general's list of subversive organizations allowed to lapse.

The FBI, meantime, has been subject to crippling restrictions that prevent it from conducting surveillance of Communist organizations until a crime is actually being committed. Agents of the Bureau were actually indicted and convicted for violating the privacy of the so-called Weather Underground, a violent Communist organization with links to Castro's Cuba. The CIA has been subjected to similar withering attack, demoralization, and limits on its operations overseas.

Finally, in a federal government that gives four million people security clearances, it is official policy *not* to ask a prospective employee if he is a Communist—because this would violate his civil liberties! Indeed, according to the federal courts, membership in the Communist party as such is not a disqualification for working in the federal government.

Under the circumstances, trying to keep the Soviets and their agents from penetrating our society, stealing secrets and working other lethal mischief is like trying to bail water with a sieve. If there aren't a score of other Walker cases going on right now, it is only because the Soviets have been incredibly inept or we have been miraculously lucky. By the way we have conducted ourselves in handling these matters, we certainly have done little or nothing to prevent them.

In the wake of the Walker disclosures, Congress has moved to impose new limits on Soviet diplomatic personnel in the United States, which is a welcome initiative. It is a long way, however, from being enough. What is urgently needed is in-depth investigation of the whole internal security/intelligence mess, to determine the full extent to which the relevant safeguards have been eroded, the damage that has been inflicted, and what can be done to correct the situation.

Thanks to the abolition of the internal security committees (partially corrected with the establishment of the Senate Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism), there is no natural jurisdiction for such an inquiry. All too obviously, there should be. The first thing Congress needs to do to restore a semblance of reason in this crucial area is to reconstitute these committees fully, give them sufficient staff and funding, and put them back to work while we still have something left to be protected. ■